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ABSTRACT

A discussion of bilingual education in the Basque Country of Spain presents and compares three language education program/policy models: (1) the traditional approach to language instruction as a subject area, found to be minimally effective in developing second language skills; (2) partial immersion, originally with instruction almost exclusively in the second language from ages 3-6, then in both languages, a model later involving more extensive exposure in the native language; and (3) instruction entirely in Basque, used in both predominantly Basque-speaking and Spanish-speaking communities, with varying results depending on the native-language composition of the classes and the treatment of native-speaking students as a resource. The last model is gaining in popularity in the Basque Country. Research on the effectiveness of the three models in developing students' language proficiency is examined briefly. Contains 4 references. (MSE)

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THE LINGUISTIC IMMERSION AND THE PROGRAMS OF BILINGUAL EDUCATION IN THE BASQUE COUNTRY

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Background

If we understand the linguistic immersion in its right terms, that is to say, the learning of a second language, aimed for children whose first language is socially prevailing, in the school environment through the learning of contents, not like subject but using the target-language to learn things in the classroom; we have to back until the moment when the ikastolas admitted in their classroom children whose mother tongue was not Euskera (Basque) but Spanish (and later French in the continental Basque Country), to find the first examples of this approach in the Basque Country.

The ikastolas are schools created by the Basque people, people of the street, to school their children in their own language, Basque; forbidden at the school during the dictatorship, mainly in the 1960s (although before this, there were some ikastolas, too)

In the 1960s there were already ikastolas that schooled Basque speaking and Spanish speaking children, being the latter a minority. These pupils, mixed usually with the Basque speaking ones, although in later years; new ikastolas were born in towns where there were practically no Basque speaking people or these ones were a minority.

What is clear is that the teachers at the ikastolas taught preferably in Euskera, language they used in class to give conventional education, although in difficult conditions, due to the lack of books and other resources in Euskera; problems that were replaced with will, work and self-denial.

At the beginning, the linguistic immersion was identified in the Basque Country, with the introduction of some Spanish speaking students in a mainly Basque speaking class that worked in Euskera.

This model, however, reached a crisis thanks, paradoxically, to the success of the ikastolas. The Spanish-speaking students stopped being a minority in the 1970s and filled the classrooms of many schools, and at the same time new ikastolas (schools that lived and taught in Euskera) were opened in places that had a totally Spanish speaking population.

At the end of the 1970s and beginning of 1980s, it was roughly manifested the necessity to find new ways, so that these Spanish speaking students, acquired enough level in the target-language; in order not to endanger their acquisition of contents, their learning of reading or mathematics.

During the same years, in which the Basque Country began to develop its self-government, people started to talk about the linguistic models and the three programs that are still operative: models A, B and D were settled down by the incipient Basque Educational Administration.

By then, the immersion in Canada was a buoyant reality, although its more relevant methodological lines were not well defined yet, and the research was concentrated, mainly, on its results.

In the Basque Country people looked upon other experiences and the opportunity to establish, like in Catalonian, a methodologically clear program of immersion and with an enormous background of investigation on world-wide scale, was lost. The star of the new regulation was model B, a kind of partial immersion whose potentiality was that the Spanish speaking children could acquire the so-called "*instrumental learning*" (Mathematics and reading) in their mother tongue.

The Models of Bilingual Education

What does the immersion have to do with the linguistic models? The previously mentioned models A, B and D, were born as different options when the time to school children comes, as in the Basque Country the parents are the ones who choose the linguistic model, according to the existing supply in the area.

In practice, these three options answer to the different profiles that a family offers in the Country with regard to Euskera.

Model A

This is not a program of bilingual education but the traditional learning of a second language as a subject. This approach for the learning of languages, nowadays excelled, is the possible minimum choice for any family and its presence, although still important in the Secondary Education, is becoming lower and lower in the Basque Educational System.

The traditional approach of the subject-language has usually been centred in the study of grammar, the practice of not-contextualized exercises and the absence of a real production of the language, together with a low intensity as for school hours.

For some years, even the most traditional education (some religious centres, mainly) has began to moves towards the more effective models in the learning of the Euskera.

The results of the mentioned model A, with regard to the learning of L2, have shown, for years, a very low effectiveness.

In this sense, some years ago, all the consulted experts recommended, without success, to the Department of Education, Universities and Research, the improvement of model A, demanding that, at least, Euskera was used to give some of the subjects of the curriculum.

The fact is that the Basque families are increasingly choosing, mainly, models B end D to school their children; which creates serious problems with good part of the teaching staff of the system, who, owing to their ignorance of Euskera, cannot respond to the increasing social demand.

The Department of Education started, with the purpose of trying to adapt the teaching staff to the demands of the parents, an ambitious program of linguistic recycling, through which the teachers, mainly civil servants, learn Euskera and are able to give the classes in this language. This can create, however, quality problems, having cases in which the students speak better Euskera than the teachers.

Model B

This model of bilingual teaching, which we include among the immersion programs, was born as an alternative to the bad results in the learning of the Euskera obtained by the Spanish-speaking students at the ikastolas. Son of the audiolingual approaches, foresaw the intensive processing (learning centred on the language) with practice exercises (drills) that tried to establish automatism; stories in which appeared structures, that later were repeated, and the extensive processing of the real use of the language in school situations. At the beginning it gave more importance to the good acquisition of the instrumental learning in the pupil's mother tongue (at that time, it was believed that the learning in the second language, without having enough level, could cause problems of efficiency in Reading and Mathematics) than to the acquisition of L2. This made it fell in great contradictions.

For some time, schooling in the Basque Country was started at the age of 3. This meant that in model B they worked almost all the time in L2 for three years. Once the Primary Education began, at the age of 6, they started to learn Reading and Mathematics in the pupil's mother tongue. This produced a reduction of the level of Euskera and, paradoxically, didn't correspond with a better learning of Reading or Mathematics (see Olaziregi, 1994). This reduction in the level of Euskera, however, endangered the efficiency in the subjects given in the second language (basically Social and Natural Sciences). Similar results have been obtained in Canada with other programs of partial immersion.

In time, many models B have evolved to some more intensive expositions, which in many cases have ended up been mistaken for model D and in other occasions have establish a partial immersion in which Literacy and Mathematics are taught in the second language, in Euskera.

The present normative allows great freedom when focusing model B, which, de facto, has produced a diversity of the mentioned model. Another fact to consider is the availability of Basque speaking teaching staff in each centre, essential when making a model B more or less intensive, with a greater or smaller presence of Euskera.

The results of model B, as for the learning of the Euskera, are quite better than those of model A, as it exist a real use of the language in real situation, but usually, they not reach a level of Euskera similar to the one of students in model D. Of course, they are far from the level of native speakers.

Model D

This model is the heir of the learning programs of the ikastolas and keeps a double personality, which often prevents it from a methodological reflection in the light of the last researches on immersion pedagogy.

The Basque speaking students, for whom school works, theoretically, in their mother tongue, are usually schooled in model D. In towns with a good percentage of Basque speakers, models D are quite homogeneous, as it is common to have a concentration in certain centres.

In other basically Spanish speaking settlements, however, model D is an early total immersion program even more intensive than its homologous Canadian or Catalan, since there are no other subject in Spanish than Spanish language. This would be what in Canada has been called "*superimmersion*" , In many other cases, the percentage of Basque speakers and Spanish speakers vary enormously in models D, which creates different situations, difficult to arrange, facing the necessities that each kind of students has with regard to Euskera.

The methodology used in model D (which is also applicable to model B) has been reduced, too many times, to "*give the classes in Euskera*", assuming that this, the learning of contents in Euskera, is enough to make the immersion students learn the L2 and the native ones progress in the knowledge of their language.

The assumption, however, is not real, as it has been shown in several investigations, and as many experts acknowledge nowadays. The learning of contents, as Merrill Swain says, does not have to be a good way for the learning of L2 (Swain, 1988). At least, while the attainment of linguistic targets in the activities done, is not searched.

On the other hand, we have the problem of the different necessities of the students and the maintenance in the quality of the mother tongue.

The natives, a minority in the immersion classes, will get bored in the first courses and will end up, further on, using the pidgin or interlanguage if the learners of Euskera, just because the majority does so, degrading their own family language.

Since the Spanish speakers don't take advantage of the native students as a model and "*reference*" interlocutor, they will develop a good level of comprehension and communication like in most of the immersion programs, but they will produce a low quality Euskera, full of fossilised errors.

All this raised three basic questions in the operation of model D, the one that attracts more students in the Basque Country every year:

1. The preservation of the quality levels of the Basque speakers students' Euskera.
2. The methodological renovation in the immersion programs in the light of the present currents, beyond "giving the classes in L2", optimising the learning of Euskera through the teaching of contents (this includes the use of the native speakers to learn the L2)
3. The assumption that school environment is, in many occasions, not enough to reach high quality levels in the 2nd language and that the learning must be searched in natural environments with native speakers, as they do in foreign language schools, where it is assumed that, for instance, they have to live with native families in summer.

Compared Results

Besides well-known studies as EIFE (I, II and III) and HINE (Sierra, Olaziregi, 1991), we can contribute with some more recent data about the results obtained in three models, both in the first and the second language of the student.

Taking as reference a study made at the end of Primary School (12-years-old) in 1995, these are the levels obtained in the three

models (Sierra, Olaziregi, 1997):

MEANS (10 points)	A	B	D	D-Spanish	D-Basque
Euskera	3.0	5.2	6.4	6.0	6.7
Spanish	6.5	6.6	6.3	6.4	6.3

The results of Spanish speakers and Basque speakers in model D qre clearly distinguished.

The results show that the levels of Reading Comprehension in Spanish are practically the same at the age of 12 for all the groups.

In Euskera, the differences are obvious. The students in model A obtain worse results than those in model B and D-Spanish speaking. The students in model B stay far from the level of reading Comprehension of the native speakers.

And the pupils in model D-Spanish-speaking don't reach the level of a native speaker either.

In oral skills, probably, these differences would even be greater.

(English translation: Isabel Royuela)

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